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Chinese Free U.S. Prisoner

American Richard Fecteau, held prisoner in China since 1952, crossed into Hong Kong today after being freed by the Chinese.

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THE WASHINGTON POST

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China Releases American Prisoner, Reduces the Sentence of Second

HONG KONG, Dec. 13 (Monday) (AP) — One American held prisoner in Mainland China since 1952, crossed into Hong Kong Monday, and Peking announced that the sentence of another had been reduced.

Richard Fecteau crossed the border at 2 p.m., a Hong Kong government spokesman said. He was released after serving 19 years of a 20-year sentence. Peking's New China News Agency said the life sentence of John T. Downey of New Britain, Conn., had been commuted to five years starting from the date of commutation. The agency did not give the date, but presumably it was recently.

A local newspaper had reported earlier Monday that Downey would be released with Fecteau.

Fecteau, 43, of Lynn, Mass., and Downey, 41, were captured by the Chinese in 1952 during the Korean war, when a plane on which they were passengers was shot down on a flight from Korea to Japan. The two men were listed as civilian employees of the U.S. Army, but the Chinese contended they were spies.

Fecteau was accompanied across the border by a woman named Mary Harbert, described as an American citizen.

"We don't know who she is," said the government spokesman. "She just turned up."

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